

# UNEARTHED

Senior Thesis Exhibition 2014

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Stetson University

Homer and Dolly Hand Art Center

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# GISELA FERNANDEZ

## Native Foreigner - A Fragment of My Identity

My work is a manifestation of my struggle to adapt to the mainstream values and expectations of U.S. society as a second generation immigrant. This piece portrays my difficulty to assimilate and my understanding of the country I was born in.

I am fascinated with my parents' timeworn memorabilia brought from their native countries. I collect portraits, passports, identification cards, memorial and prayer cards, and hand-written letters. These images and documents illustrate my depiction of my parents' immigration experience. I transfer these images onto wood and windows.

During this process, the purpose of a wooden sash has become something other than a window. Instead of using windows as openings in walls of buildings, I have created a house. I chose this medium because windows are sources of knowledge. Light is used as an architectural element because I am bringing light to my testimony. Several slices of wood, glass, rusty hardware, and images are juxtaposed behind the windows.

The use of wood is a reoccurring theme in my work. Rings are exposed when wood is cut. Information is gathered from these rings in the wood, which reveals its history. Wood and I are alike - My history is revealed through the values that I have acquired from my parents.



*Native Foreigner - A Fragment of My Identity* (detail), 8ft x 5ft x 6.5ft, mixed media sculpture, 2014



# RACHEL MATHEIS

## Recomposed

Matter exists endlessly in infinite combinations. Natural cycles of dispersal and reformation of matter defy human ideals of permanence, which we struggle with as living things intimately aware of our own imminent decomposition. In death we become something else: a meal, a monument, soil that will host new life. The clay in these sculptures has been mined from the earth and recomposed into the form of feet. They are tree stumps in the swamp; ready for their own decomposition. Soon the clay will deteriorate away from this human-tree hybrid form. The feet have been submitted to various environments to begin their decay before exhibition. The industrial grey sculptures are filled with organic elements visually bridging the gap between man-made and natural. Everything we are or ever make will eventually meet the same process of deterioration and decomposition. After the exhibit ends, my unfired and fragile clay feet will be placed back into the environment and decompose quickly. For a while, they will exist only as a discoloration in the swamp before time and weather disperse the clay that was once human feet.



*Recomposed* (detail), clay sculpture, 2014



# MEGAN MOLLÉ

## Nostalgic Daze

My name is Megan, and I am the child of an alcoholic.

Since my sixth birthday, the only place I've been able to see my father is in old family photos. He died from cirrhosis of the liver. Alcohol caused the separation between my father and me. These empty liquor bottles play a significant role in our "relationship," as do the photos, making it essential for me to tie the two together and incorporate them into my work. Working with these objects helps me deal with his absence by reminding me that being an alcoholic isn't a flaw in his character, just an unfortunate situation that he lost control of and wasn't able to escape.

Layering and transparency are both very important aspects of my work. The process of transferring images, adding paint and materials, and then sanding away areas, and removing some before again adding more creates a dreamy effect that is reminiscent of how memories look and feel. The process of transferring photos creates a ghostly image. It represents the way people leave traces of themselves in your life even after they are gone. I'm exploiting the transparency of the glass for two reasons. One is to cause a slight distortion of the image behind it, which speaks to the way certain events or stories can alter your memory of a person. The second is to act as a layer of protection; physical protection to keep the memories from being lost, as well as metaphoric protection that mimics my guarded nature. Including realistically painted portraits of my father gives me an opportunity to form a sort of connection with him and experience him on my own, without the influence of my family's stories and opinions of him.

*Nostalgic Daze* is not meant to be a harsh criticism of his decisions or even an elegy in memorial of his life. *Nostalgic Daze* is a physical expression of my personal exploration for acceptance and understanding about the death of my father, but my intentions are for the viewers to feel a sense of loss and longing for a person in their own lives, rather than only experiencing my account of an absent father.



*Unsettling Recollection* (detail), 44in x 52in, mixed media, 2014



# VENEZHA NORIEGA

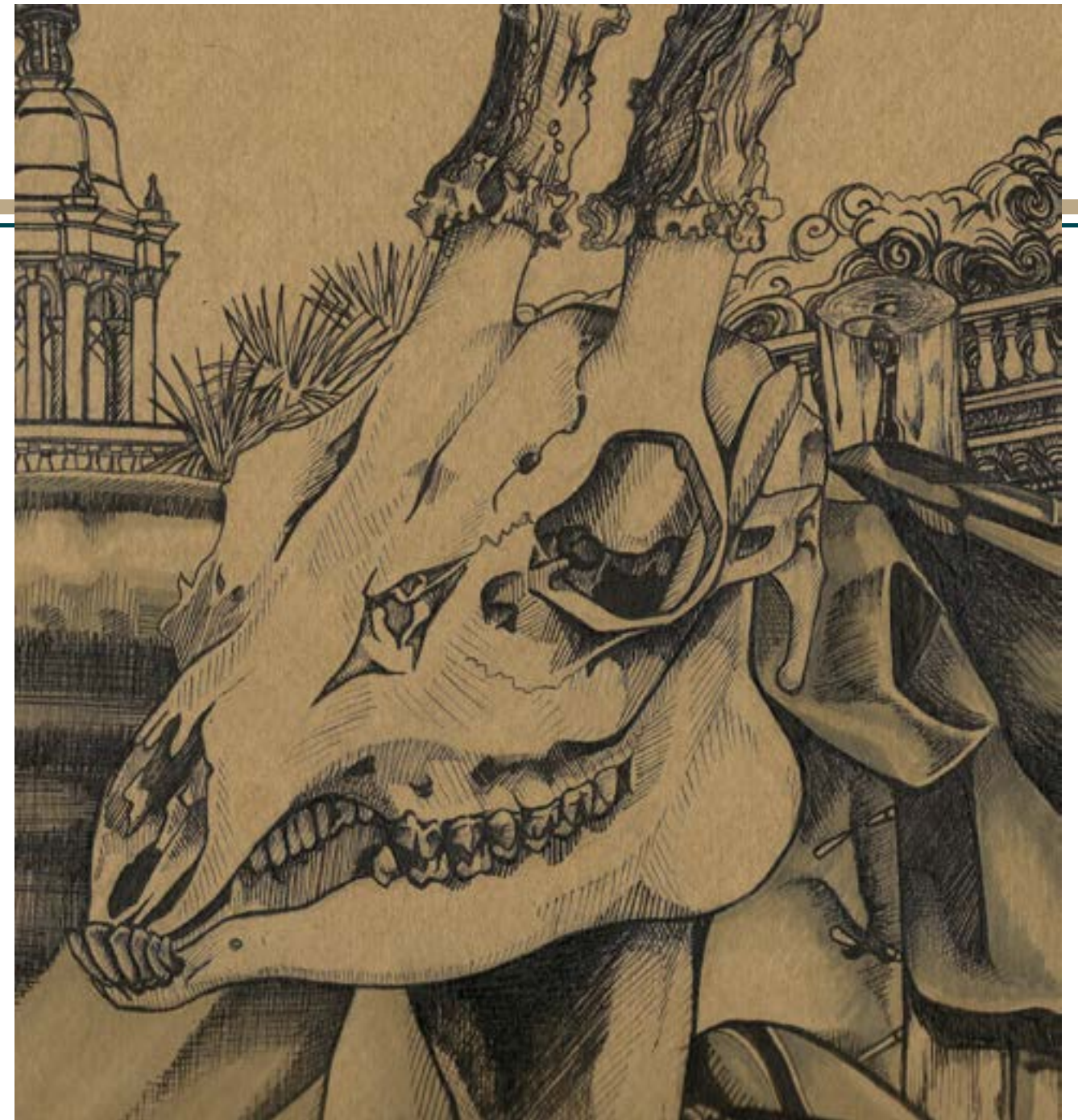
## UNAVOIDABLE

In my hands, pen and ink is the best medium I have to give voice to subjects that cannot be easily said aloud. The majority of my drawings contemplate death, a subject most tend to put aside.

The human encounter with the inevitable is often displayed either through awe or respect, but mostly fear. I prefer to keep a jovial familiarity, a distinctive trait from my Mexican heritage, where death is celebrated and welcomed as an old friend. Skulls are a universal icon representing death because it so familiar an image. Nevertheless there is an unappreciated beauty to skulls, who grin eternally, holding back on secrets unknown to the living.

However human skulls reveal a skin deep likeness that links all Homo sapiens together. This lack of uniqueness thus shifted my interests towards animal skulls, which effortlessly attribute certain characteristics to my cast of characters, most of which are of women donned with animal skulls. These women unquestionably have gained dehumanized appearances by losing the femininity of their delicate features. Instead soft lips have been traded for teeth bared in a smile. Yet it cannot be denied that their beastly qualities give them a stronger presence.

UNAVOIDABLE is composed of various drawings that explore death from what began with personal loss then branched into different psychological standpoints, which come from distanced relationships, shattered dreams and tainted morality. The close knit details within my drawings give them an aesthetic beauty that invitingly compels viewers to gaze upon the different faces I have given Death, from portraits of friends and family morphed into grinning skulls. I want viewers while fixated with the visual components presented to come to terms with the greatest certainty in our lives, from which there is no escape.



*Her Eminence, Jane Doe (detail), 18in x 14in, pen and ink, 2014*



# ASHLEIGH STUART

## Entanglement

In my work, I am using nature as a means to depict the more self-destructive aspects of our personalities that we attempt to hide. I feel that the perfect façade that we feel the need to portray is both unrealistic and unattainable. The need to bury our imperfections and failures is more destructive than the transgressions are themselves. I depict the human figure caught in a conflict between trying to escape these imperfections without being consumed by them.

Within each of my pieces, I isolate a figure caught in a moment of tension that is overwhelming, but, at the same time, tamed. Each of the figures is portrayed in a position that makes them both vulnerable, but, at the same time, in control of their situation.

The parasitic vines represent inner psychological struggles rather than specific imagery. Their dry, cracked appearance evokes an uncomfortable feeling from both a tangible and psychological standpoint. Their relationship to each of the figures is parasitic rather than symbiotic. However, they have found a way to coexist in a way that is not comfortable, but sustainable. I have depicted these vines going through the flesh to show that this affliction stems from both within the body as well as from outside sources. Although the figures appear to be escaping their entanglement, the distant shadow of vines hinders any sense of release.



*Acrimony*, oil on canvas, 36in x 24in, 2014

# SAM VALDEZ

## Analysis of Death Through Material

A painting has the ability to extract emotion from an audience beyond the elements and components it's compiled of. The material (paint) is forgotten within the contexts of the piece, and the colors, shapes and textures of the painting bring the focal point and source of representation to the viewer; the audience is introduced to their own consciousness and is most inclined to process what is beyond the physical, two-dimensional piece of work. The paint no longer is important but instead the paint becomes the host of what the artist is trying to express. The desire to achieve this quality that painting has and bring it into sculpture lead me to create my own -ism M▲teri▲l=ism.

The function of M▲teri▲l=ism is to use material and break it down in order for it to become like paint and transform it into a representation of the concept I'm trying to achieve. I want to fragment the material and bring it to a basic and minimalist form in order to rebuild it. I want the tension and emotion to be formed by fragmented material, rather than a single material; the broken down material to be seen as a whole outside of its original definition. I want this to create an experience outside of the aesthetical stimulation and instead focus of the nostalgia, emotional and intellectual stimulation, allowing the viewer to look inward and find their own personal connection while sharing indirectly my personal struggles, fears and story.

*Analysis of Death through Material* uses the concept of M▲teri▲l=ism through the display of work that shows death in different definition and parts of life. Throughout the work, everyday material is stripped from its original definition and significance and is transformed into texture, color and shapes. This allows the viewer to get lost in the work and no longer see individual objects, but instead feel the work engulf them. The space provided within the work forces the audience to explore the dimensions of the piece from within. They are able to reflect on their own personal feelings towards death, all the while gaining my personal perspective on the subject.



*Elements of Devotion*, performance art, 2013

Photo By: Michael Yan



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